



Arlington Poet Laureate Committee

Minutes

Date: Friday, August 12, 2020

Time: 5:00 PM

Location: over zoom at <https://brandeis.zoom.us/j/92443647210>

Present: John Burt (chair), Stewart Deck, Lidia Kenig-Scher, Carol Band

1) Introduction of New Members of the Committee

We introduced ourselves and shared our backgrounds both in Arlington and in the arts in Arlington and elsewhere. Stewart Deck has been appointed by the School Department (to replace Liza Halley), and Lidia Kenig-Scher has been appointed by the Arlington Cultural Arts Council (to replace Pamela Powell).

2) Reappointment of Laureate

We reappointed Steven Ratiner as Poet Laureate of Arlington for the 2020-2021 term unanimously.

3) Progress Report from the Laureate

Steven was able to speak with us only briefly. Technical issues required him to contact us by phone rather than by zoom. And he was called away by the computer repair after some minutes. We will receive a progress report and update from him in our September meeting.

4) New Projects and Ideas

The committee expressed enthusiasm over the success of the online Red Letters project, which was praised extensively in an article in the Boston Globe on July 17, 2020. (The article is attached.) The project was originally intended to use physical mail to send poems to randomly selected Arlington residents in actual red envelopes. (In ancient Rome, important dates were marked with red letters in the calendar). When the Covid-19 epidemic began, Steven decided to circulate the poems, together with a brief explanation of the project, a brief biography of the poet (often an Arlington resident, but poets are drawn from across the Boston area), and a brief account of the poem's form and strategy, in a weekly email. The weekly emails have been shared widely all over the United States, reaching perhaps tens of thousands of people.

We discussed some other possibilities to raise with Steven in September. We raised the possibility of organizing grant applications to the Mass Cultural Council and other similar groups. Stewart raised the possibility of setting up zoom poetry workshops in the Arlington public schools and offered to use his connections in the school system to help these things happen. He also suggested that since students at Arlington High School must complete service projects to graduate that some good students in English might be willing to serve as interns to Steven. Some of these interns might help with the social-media aspects of the position, publicizing our Facebook page and giving us a presence on Instagram, or perhaps producing a live podcast series. John raised the possibility of sending actual paper red letters, as Steven had originally proposed to do, to less computer-literate readers such as the elderly in the buildings administered by the Arlington Housing Authority.

We propose to meet again some time during the first two weeks of September.

The meeting adjourned at 6:10 PM.